

Review: [untitled]

Author(s): John D. French

Reviewed work(s):

Carcamano e Comendadores. Os italianos de São Paulo: Da realidade à ficção (1919-1930) by Mário Carelli

Source: *Luso-Brazilian Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter, 1988), pp. 99-101

Published by: University of Wisconsin Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3513265>

Accessed: 29/09/2008 09:10

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=uwisc>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



University of Wisconsin Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Luso-Brazilian Review*.

Mario Carelli, *Carcamano e Comendadores. Os italianos de São Paulo: Da realidade à ficção (1919-1930)*. Lygia Maria Pondé Vassalo, trans. Sao Paulo: Atica, 1985.

Written by a Franco-Brazilian researcher, *Carcamano e Comendadores* focuses on how São Paulo's educated urban elites came to terms with the massive Italian immigrant presence during the early twentieth century. Carelli argues for a more conflictual and nuanced portrayal of the assimilation of Italians into Paulista society, a process that was not without "prejudices and clashes on both sides." Written as an extended essay in literary sociology, the author examines the "literary and para-literary" images of the Italian in Paulista popular theater, journalism, and in the modernist literature of the 1920s.

The book's title captures the "ambiguity of the Italian presence, at the same time accepted and rejected by certain strata of the Paulista population." While the stereotype of the Italian-immigrant-as-anarchist labor rebel prevails today, São Paulo's *quatrocentão* elites in the First Republic were often more concerned with the threat represented by Italian successes. Nativist discontent spawned deprecatory turn-of-the-century terms such as *carcamano*, drawn from the expression *calca la mano* said to be used by Italian shopkeepers to tell their assistants to even the weight of a purchase by putting their hand on the balance. Portraying Italians as sleazy merchants, arrogant Italian patriots, and people who massacred the Portuguese language, they reserved special scorn for the figure of the upstart nouveau rich immigrant--typified by the Matarazzos and their palace on Avenida Paulista--who sought status through honorific knightly titles such as *comendador*.

In dealing with the Paulista stereotyping of Italians, Carelli reminds us that the process of immigrant assimilation in São Paulo was not inevitable or unremarkable. Yet the author's larger purpose is not to emphasize discord but rather the special nature and "real affinities" involved with the Italo-Paulista approximation. "To what extent," Carelli asks, "did Paulistas italianize themselves in assimilating the Italians, that is, in incorporating them into their society?" While dealing exclusively with the urban side of this process, the author touches on the emergence of the Italo-Paulista on one side of the divide and, to use Monteiro Lobato's phrase, of Paulistalinos on the Brazilian side.

While reflecting a thorough reading of the secondary bibliography, the author's sixty-two page historical sketch on Italian immigration to São Paulo is not well integrated into the book and fails to truly shed light on the connections between society and its literary and artistic emanations. Yet this weakness is not fatal for a work which, as the author notes, was not intended as an analysis of the historical, sociological, economic and political factors at work.

The author then provides a thirty page overview of the Italian images presented in Paulista theater, caricature, and journalism

between 1899 and the 1920s. After a brief discussion of the Italo-Paulista illustrator Voltolino, he examines the hilarious Italian/Portuguese mixture, the "língua macarrônica," best exemplified by the Paulista journalist Alexandre Ribeiro Marcondes Machado. Following in a tradition of dialect humor, the humorous figure of "Juó Bananére"--illustrated by Voltolino--emerged as the stereotyped if all too human image of the Italians of São Paulo around World War I.

The author then provides a summary treatment of the differing views of the Italian presence expressed by modernist writers such as Menotti del Picchia, Plínio Salgado, and Mário de Andrade in the early 1920s. Having created a framework for comparison, Carelli finally arrives at his main thesis regarding the Paulista writer and politician Antônio de Alcântara Machado whose well known 1927 work, *Brás, Bexiga e Barra Funda*, sought to portray the realities of life in three Italian neighborhoods in São Paulo.

While praised for incorporating new material into literature, this modernist work by Alcântara Machado has been seen by other critics as an expression of the "prejudices of his aristocratic caste" towards the Italians, an expression of "Paulista atavism." Rejecting this interpretation, Carelli goes even further and presents these *novelas* as a key step in the progressive resolution of the contradictions between Italians and Paulistas.

While unfamiliar with Carelli's larger dialogue with his Brazilian literary compatriots, this reviewer found his case for Alcântara Machado to be overdrawn if not misleading. Recognizing the book's exclusion of the life of the working class Italian majority, Carelli himself is aware of the limitations of this work by "an aristocrat who sees the people with an ironic eye."

Yet Carelli is quick to hail the absence in Alcântara Machado of the hostile and negative stereotypes of Italians he finds in the work of Mário de Andrade. Yet Alcântara Machado's celebration of Italian assimilation is based on an all-too-obvious projection of what constitutes an "acceptable Italian" and thus implicitly its negative opposite. In his stories, a wealthy Italian family offers their son and aid to an eminently respectable if impoverished and touchy family of the Paulista aristocracy. His second generation Italo-Paulistas refuse to speak the Italian of their parents and adopt exaggerated Brazilian patriotic enthusiasms. The plot of yet another story tells of the Italian who works hard, prospers, and in the end, commits himself definitively by seeking Brazilian naturalization (a very rare occurrence in reality).

If sketchy and forced at points, Carelli's work nonetheless reminds scholars that we must not neglect the specifically ethnic as opposed to class dimension of the constitution of modern Paulista society. With the exception of work by José de Souza Martins, we lack a detailed understanding of the Italian immigrant community as a whole. Instead, we know a disproportionate amount about a very tiny radical minority with little sense of where they fit in the larger picture of immigrant community dynamics and Brazilian/immigrant interactions.

Through works by Silvia Magnani and others, we have come to know a great deal about the Italian immigrants who published short-lived radical newspapers in São Paulo. Yet we still lack a full length study of the far more significant, nationalistic and conservative Italian language press of the First Republic, especially the daily São Paulo *Fanfulla*. The Italian radical's sense of isolation within his ethnic community in the 1920s is best captured in the largely unknown biography by Francisco Frola, a former Italian socialist Deputy active in anti-fascist agitation in São Paulo and Rio between 1926 and 1938 (*Recuerdos de un Antifascista*. Mexico: Editorial Mexico Nuevo, 1939). Frola's experience at the hands of the São Paulo police and judges left him, at least, convinced that "good Italians" had indeed been accepted by the Paulista oligarchy in the late 1920s.

John D. French  
Florida International University

Frederick C. Luebke, *Germans in Brazil: A Comparative History of Cultural Conflict during World War I*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987.

This model exercise in comparative history represents the first venture into the Southern Hemisphere by a United States scholar who has published extensively on the acculturation of German immigrants in North America and written the standard account of their experience during the First World War. Brazil, long a favorite subject for comparison with the frontier of slavery and race relations in the United States, was a natural choice here. It was the only Latin American state to declare war on Germany in 1917, and home to the largest German minority anywhere on its continent. As Luebke himself hastens to admit (5), he is more at home in interpreting the ethnic community of Teuto-Brazilians than the Luso-Brazilian dominant society. But even so, he is remarkably evenhanded in his account of this conflict-ridden era, not hesitating to call a chauvinist a chauvinist regardless of ethnicity.

One-third of the book is devoted to the period before 1914, providing the first synthesis in English of the social and